

penitentiary system and the Parole Board are being administered and, as well, the way in which the leave system is being administered.

I take it from what I have heard tonight that this resolution will receive the unanimous support of the House. However, after listening to some of the speakers I am somewhat bewildered by the unanimity of that support, because some speakers addressed the House in such a way that one realizes they do not seem terribly impressed with the necessity for this kind of investigation. In fact, they seem to regret the fact that the point has been raised at all. But I would suggest that the hon. member who has introduced this resolution deserves the commendation of the House for bringing it forcibly and clearly to the attention of parliament and the public. He should be commended for giving us the opportunity to participate in this debate which is of such concern to every responsible citizen throughout this land.

The reason it is a matter of great concern is not simply because of the breaking out from Laval of five prisoners over the weekend. That, surely, was the last straw that the public could bear. It was, surely, the final incident in a long series of events which taken together have so weakened public confidence in the way the penitentiary system is being administered that the kind of debate we are having tonight is the least that parliament could do, and the kind of investigation proposed in this resolution is the least action we could undertake.

As I say, it is the last in a long series of events of a like kind. For example, when we think of the way in which the temporary leave of absence program has been administered, we have to look at how time after time prisoners have been released on temporary leave and have not come back. Some prisoners released without escort have taken the opportunity, not as a chance to adjust to society but to return to organized crime.

● (2140)

In March of this year alone we saw one prisoner allowed out to look for a job escaping his escort in a department store in Vancouver. In Sault Ste. Marie we read of a man who was allowed out to visit his home and he did not go back to prison. In Joyceville we read of a man who was allowed out to attend a prayer meeting. Indeed, he must have thought this was an answer to his prayer. Anyway, he did not come back. Then we read of a man allowed out to attend a funeral parlour, which it may be said has a certain function in covering up, and he did not come back. This sort of thing goes on and on. The minister has admitted to this House and to the committee that the system is not perfect. We agree, but we ask him to take those steps that will lead to reducing the number of prisoners who, without escort, are allowed out of prison even though they may have a record of crimes of violence.

Similarly, with respect to the administration of the parole program we are only asking that this program be reviewed in such a way that we can take a serious look at the number of people being granted parole, who have received parole not for the first time, possibly not for the second time but have received a number of paroles and have shown a singular lack of desire to take their parole responsibilities seriously.

Penitentiaries

We are asking the minister to take a look at parole so that this record will be changed. We are simply asking that that program and the penitentiary system be administered with responsibility. We are not asking for any kind of punitive policy. If that was the policy of the penitentiary service in times past, certainly we would not wish to return to it. But we would not, and could not accept any suggestion that we ought to allow a continuation of the kind of policy which has brought us to this situation tonight. That is what we want to change.

Believe me, Mr. Speaker, it is in the interests of a rehabilitation program that we make changes in the way the system is being administered, because if the public is to have confidence in the kind of reform and rehabilitation program to which the minister is committed and to which parliament as a whole is committed in terms of passing the budget necessary to maintain that program, then the public is entitled to have a penitentiary service that is administered with due respect for security. That is what we are asking. We suggest that once the public loses confidence in the administration of the penitentiary service because of the way in which this kind of escape is allowed to take place and these violations of the temporary leave of absence program are allowed to take place—these things which negligence has allowed to take place—then we cannot expect people to have any confidence in the leadership and the direction of the rehabilitation program.

I hope, Mr. Speaker, that I have made it abundantly clear that our concern is not in any way to minimize the need for a healthy, responsible rehabilitation program; that our concern is to see the program carried out with common sense and prudence so that public confidence will be maintained.

I hope that when the committee is established it will have the opportunity, as mentioned by a previous speaker, of visiting penal institutions and talking with the custodial staff, and indeed with the inmates and with anybody else who has testimony and evidence to offer, so that a report will come back to this House along with recommendations that will tighten up the program to the extent that it is loose, that will fill in the holes to the extent that they are there, and that will recommend changes in the program to the extent that they are necessary so that public confidence can once again be placed in the penitentiary service.

Mr. John Gilbert (Broadview): Mr. Speaker, the events of recent weeks cannot be laid at the door of the present Solicitor General (Mr. Allmand). He has brought to his office a dedication, a spirit and a sincerity that have won the support of the members of this House and of Canadians generally. When he stated that the events of recent weeks had made him feel flabbergasted and disgusted, I could quite agree with him. Indeed, the guards at Cowansville and at St. Vincent de Paul make the Keystone cops look like Scotland Yard.

It is time we took a different approach to the problems facing us today. When a young man is charged, convicted and sentenced, two obligations face society. One is to hold the inmate in custody for the period of his sentence, subject to remission and/or parole. The second is to pre-